

have the plastics getting so brittle that they break and are not repairable.

When you're shopping for a used car from that era, you have to ask: What was the climate where that car lived? If the car came from Texas, every time you take a plastic part off the car, you might as well be sure you have a replacement when you need to put it back on. A car from a place like Seattle where it's not incredibly hot and there's not a lot of UV damage, because there's a lot of cloud cover, might be OK. But eventually time will get all these polypropylene parts.

Is it possible that 25 years from now we collectively might decide that it's charming when those 1990s plastics turn gray?

I've been wrong about a lot of things in life, but I don't think anybody will value that.

Does that mean that in 2050 we will clearly know the difference between a patina-era and a non-patina-era car?

A lot of it will depend on the car. There may be within a certain car community an appreciation for some aspect of the degradation of the materials, like we do today for cars in the '50s and '60s that are original. But it's going to depend on how those materials were used in a particular vehicle.

Here's another example: leather, which people value a lot, but which has changed and evolved. If you look at a car from the '60s or '70s and into the '80s, leather seating was literally leather sewn together, which can be repaired. And if it's a really nice car with a thick hide properly dyed rather than simply sprayed with a topcoat of color, you can get a beautiful patina as the leather wears in and you start to see some of the layers of the material. These leathers didn't have coatings to prevent moisture from getting in. So you could put a cream on the leather, what we call "hide food."

But in the '90s, car companies started laminating the leather to protect it and add softness. The leather is laminated to a foam scrim, or backing, to provide some initial softness when you touch the material. But over time, the foam backing starts to break down and delaminate. And then the leather seat looks like a sleeping bag. Look at, say, a 2007 Aston Martin V8 Vantage or DB9 or an '07 Bentley Azure convertible. You peer into the interior and you say: My goodness, these seats look terrible, loose and baggy. It's because the foam has delaminated and turned to dust. It's common across most premium automakers—I have this conversation all the time with the Rolls-Royce community.

What if that coated leather cracks?

Putting hide food on modern leathers is a waste of time and money because the coatings are designed to prevent, to repel, absorption.

The leather that we of a certain generation loved because of the way it looked, felt, and smelled, and its incredible durability? That traditional material is not considered to have a premium haptic anymore. Today's luxury buyer would find it to be too hard and firm to the touch. That all changed due to the consumer desire for this sensory perception. It's also worth pointing out that the cost of leather is very high in more than mere dollars. Leather is extremely heavy.

Foam lamination is also used for vinyl. When we say vinyl, what we usually mean in the car industry is a PVC-coated cloth. And when you talk about synthetic leather that you might find in a modern upscale car like a Lucid or Rivian, that typically is polyurethane. In the business, we would always call that "PU" or "PUR" for polyurethane. And the technical term for these treatments, by the way, is polymeric films.

If we say vinyl, that's internally [inside car companies and suppliers], because we know that the consumer doesn't like that word, so we don't use the word vinyl if we're talking about the higher-end product that's polyurethane-based, even though it is indeed just vinyl.

Everybody would consider it vinyl, but the industry often draws a distinction between PVC vinyl and PUR by calling PUR "vegan leather"—but they're both just petroleum-based polymeric films. The main difference is that the PUR feels more like leather.

None of these plasticized interior materials is going to age well?

Well, that's one benefit of PVC. It looks good and lasts forever. Everybody's heard of MB-Tex. You can see a 50-year-old Mercedes and the seats look brand new.

Is PVC vinyl a candidate for patina?

No. Patina implies that it has a worn look. This stuff just doesn't wear; it can last a very, very long time. Now, of course, like everything, there are really cheap versions where you can wear off the topcoat. But, you know, a car that has a really nice PVC vinyl will keep a new look or good condition look for an extremely long time.

You mentioned Corvette earlier. If we're talking C4 through C8 Corvettes, in 2050, will there be aftermarket replacements for both interior and exterior plastics?

I think the cost of injection molding tooling is lower and lower all the time, and 3D printing will allow people to replace parts that would have otherwise not been available. But these are going to be like new spec. There's no way in 2050 to make a C7 Corvette have patina as we currently perceive patina.

So, back to our earlier thesis, patina may die after 1980...

I think your thesis is accurate. // jdematio@hagerty.com